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THE CITIZEN

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Hillary sees Pres' Robben Island cell

ROBBEN ISLAND. - President Mandela showed US First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and her daughter Chelsea his tiny prison cell on Robben Island where he spent most of

his 27 years in jail.

Pres Mandela was imprisoned for 18 years on the island as part of a life sentence.

"Would you like to come and join us," Pres Mandela told reporters peeking through the window of the small cell.

Mrs Clinton, on the last day of her visit to South Africa, watched quietly as Pres Mandela showed her the yellow-painted cell, furnished with a table and a single bed.

He felt the mattress and told the Clintons the bed he had slept on had been bigger and he had put a plank under the

mattress to ease his back pain.

He showed them other parts of the prison and other cells where he had stayed and pointed to a wooden door saying: "When I was in this cell I acted usually as a spokesman for the prisoners".

Pres Mandela said he was later moved to another cell at the end of the hall out of the way because other prisoners had relied on him to speak on their behalf.

As he and his visitors left the cell in the maximum security Block B, set aside for political prisoners, Pres Mandela put

his arm around Chelsea's shoulder.

He then led his visitors to the exercise courtyard and told Mrs Clinton pointing to a place alongside a wall: "I had a garden there."

A US official on the tour said later Pres Mandela's political manuscripts had been buried in the garden to hide them from guards.

Mrs Clinton toured other parts of the prison and drove down to the quarry where Pres Mandela and his fellow prisoners had worked breaking rocks.

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THE CITIZEN

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Hillary sees Mandela's cell

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Asked her impression of the prison island Mrs Clinton said: "It's an extraordinary chance to be here and to be in his cell with him and come to this quarry and think about all those years that were spent here."

At the end of the tour US comedian Bill Cosby appeared from a building.

Asked what he was doing on the island Cosby joked: "I don't want to go to jail anymore".

Cosby hammed it up former prison on Robben Island, but also said he was deeply impressed by the spirit of the men who had suffered there.

He was also shown Pres Mandela's cell by the president.

Afterwards Cosby raised a laugh from on-lookers by yelling "free!" and pretending to escape from the block. He also rattled a tin cup on the bars of a cell and demanded to be released.

But in an interview Cosby said he was moved by the resilience and lack of bitterness of former prisoners.

"To hear these men proudly talking about their philosophy and strength ... They won,

they really won," he said.

"It's as if in our country you hear people talking about touchdown passes for the Superbowl. It's a victory, it's truly a victory."

Most people would hopefully never find themselves in circumstances that caused such pain, Cosby said.

"We are talking about all sorts of degradation, all sorts of inhuman ways of being treated — that even a horse, if you equate the two, the human being cared better for the horse than for the human being."

Cosby, Pres Mandela, US First Lady Mrs Hillary Clinton and a host of other celebrities were on the island for a fund-raising banquet in aid of the island museum and former prisoners.

For those prepared to pay R250 000 a couple and were on the guest list, this is what they have at last night's banquet.

The starter, according to the hand-lettered menu, was salmon tartare with bouquet of cucumber.

This was followed by consomme of tarragon with chicken dumplings, and baby chicken stuffed with wild rice and pistachio nuts.

For afters there were three varieties of fruit sorbet with fresh fruit, a

cheese plate, coffee and sweetmeats.

The 80 guests were able to choose from a list of wines that included Southern Right, Sauvignon Blanc, Meerlust, Rubicon 1991, and Klein Constantia. — Reuter, Sapa.

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